

Shrink Rap Radio #42, July 21st, 2006. Happy Birthday, Dr. Freud.
Transcribed by Jason Howard (www.digitaltranscriptionservice.com)

Excerpt: *“I think I was looking for a kind of bridge between behavioristic psychology, in which I’d been trained, and a more cognitive psychology that was just taking shape. It seemed at that point that Freud’s theory offered models of how the mind would work in complex ways. But behind that, I think, were deeper personal motives. I was intensely caught up in myself -- my struggle for my own understanding -- and Freud touched that in a way that no one else who was nominally a psychologist did. The other experiences I had where I felt I was that close to the workings of a complex mind with which I could identify were probably in literature. So Freud really called to me in a way that I don’t think I’ve experienced before or since, at least not with anyone who you could claim to read as part of a graduate degree in psychology.”*

Introduction: That was the voice of my long-time friend Dr. Douglas A. Davis, who recently retired from full-time teaching at Haverford College in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, where he was professor of psychology, and for many years, department chair. Long-time listeners will remember Dr. Davis from Shrink Rap Radio #15 on Islamic Psychology. Among his many interests, Doug is a Freud Scholar. He is also one of the most interesting conversationalists it’s ever been my pleasure to know. As you listen to the interview, I think you will see what I mean.

Dr. Dave: My guest today is Dr. Douglas A. Davis. Doug, welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

Davis: I am delighted to be here.

Dr. Dave: Well, it’s hard to believe that we’re celebrating the 150th year since Freud’s birth. Now, you’ve been a Freud scholar for some time now -- a bit less than the full 150 years. What is it that drew you to the study of Freud?

Davis: Well, that’s turned out to be a complicated question. I majored in psychology at the University of Minnesota in the early ‘60’s, and I read some short papers by Freud. I read Civilization and Its Discontents. I’ve laid hands on my undergraduate copy, some years ago, and there were a couple of little marginal exclamation points and “now, really’s!” I obviously found the argument a little far-fetched. Those were my more rigorous philosophy of science days, but in graduate school -- in a situation you know well -- the influence of psychodynamics based on Freud’s work was very strong at Michigan in the late ‘60’s. I started reading Freud more extensively at the advice of my major advisor, and for what I guess we called a candidacy paper -- a literature review -- I reviewed the classical Freudian literature, focusing on the so-called meta-psychological papers of the years around the time of the First World War. Some of the ‘50’s and ‘60’s vintage ego psychology -- Erik Erikson, David Rapaport --

and I think I was looking for a kind of bridge between behavioristic psychology, in which I'd been trained, and a more cognitive psychology that was just taking shape. It seemed at that point that Freud's theory offered models of how the mind would work in complex ways. But behind that, I think, were deeper personal motives. I was intensely caught up in myself -- my struggle for my own understanding -- and Freud touched that in a way that no one else who was nominally a psychologist did. The other experiences I had where I felt I was that close to the workings of a complex mind with which I could identify were probably in literature. So Freud really called to me in a way that I don't think I've experienced before or since, at least not with anyone who you could claim to read as part of a graduate degree in psychology.

Dr. Dave: OK. That's a nice, full answer. You know, there's been so much controversy surrounding Freud over the years, and his second demise was predicted, but still he seems to be with us. Why should we still be interested in Freud today?

Davis: Well, as you can imagine, I've thought about that. In fact, I've been thinking about it today, just anticipating the question. But for years, teaching at Haverford -- Haverford and Bryn Mawr students as I have -- many of them are children of academics and often of clinical psychologists and occasionally even of analysts. Except for the children of analysts, I often got the question, particularly when I made them read fairly substantial amounts of Freud in intro psych, hasn't Freud been superceded? Haven't his ideas been proven wrong? I think, in summary, there are two answers to that question. The scope of what Freud undertook... I argued in intro psych, and we can get into this if you wish, that there are at least four major sorts of theoretical work that Freud does, each with implications for psychology. There is simply no one else at that level. There's no one else with quite that scope and reach and early influence. In a Thomas Kuhnian sense, if you're going to give up a complex theory, you give it up for something better, and the something better hasn't come along. So even though Freud appears to be inadequate, in most respects, looked at closely -- and stunningly wrong in some -- there's been a reluctance to throw his theory away until we have something equally usable in its place. So Freud's death has been often announced but he keeps snapping back. We're still looking for the corpus delicti. Maybe it's a mystery like that of Jimmy Hoffa who keeps surfacing in various ways.

Dr. Dave: Right. What do you see as those four areas that you referred to?

Davis: Well, first, Freud was trained as a neurologist in the 1870's in Vienna, and he did some additional work, both in northern Italy as a student, and then in Charcot's establishment in Paris. He was clearly fascinated by the idea that there could be a natural science of the mind. That suited his professors like Brücke very nicely. So the first Freud is a kind of neurologist who believes himself to be bridging from what neurology would eventually claim as its own discipline --- except that, of course, there was no adequate understanding of the mechanics of the central

nervous system. The functions of the synapses weren't even really understood when Freud was trained. He then becomes a psychologist and approaches more general psychological questions. Freud never gave up the idea that if he hadn't contributed to a natural science psychology, his ideas would prove to be useful in that way. So the first Freud, I suppose, is a kind of neurologist. The second one - - and the one that I've probably been most intensely involved with -- is the one that takes shape in the last five years of the 19th century. We know this through Freud's early writings, but also through his voluminous correspondence with his nose and throat physician buddy in Berlin -- Wilhelm Fliess. That's the Freud of the Interpretation of Dreams and the Freud of the early clinical work in which what the patient or client can tell you about their problems is only a stepping off point into what they cannot tell you directly and are therefore expressing indirectly. We could call that the hermeneutic Freud. The Freud who leads us into a preoccupation with very complicated questions of interpretation in which one dream, if it's adequately understood, occupies -- even though the dream may be only a few words or a paragraph -- many, many pages of commentary, as the patient -- who in the case of Freud's Dream book is he himself (so it's an autobiographical work) -- in which the patient is led to realize that the woman in the dream was herself but also her friend who I wish were my patient, and my own daughter who experienced similar symptoms, and my pregnant wife, and so on, and so on. You're led into a very elaborate world of understanding. Although he appears very early, as I said, and he's more or less in place by 1900 when Freud finishes the interpretation of Dreams, that's the Freud who is not so much the major proponent of a modernist psychology with a grand scheme. He's actually a doorway into the post-modern, as you have to closely read every bit of symptomatology, every bit of commentary, every bit of emotional reaction to a piece of humor. Then the third Freud is the overtly psychoanalytic Freud who articulates a theory of so-called psycho-sexual development; the familiar oral, anal, phallic stages; the idea that little children experience very complicated erotic lives as they struggle mentally to understand things that they can't understand and cannot fully experience physically. That developmental, clinical theorist who thinks he can identify in the adult neurosis some of the circumstances of the childhood that made this individual susceptible to that neurosis -- that's an immensely important influence on developmental psychology and to some extent on therapy. Then the fourth Freud is really a commentator on culture. When he realizes that, as he puts it -- my own lust for my mother and murderous hostility toward my father must be universal because it's the plot of all dramas on family history from Oedipus Rex to Hamlet -- that Freud writes monographs on the early history of religion; he writes grand treatises on the evolution of human culture. Now, if you identify those four sources -- the neurologist, the interpreter, the articulator of a developmental theory, and the cultural theorist, we seem to ignore the Freud who actually made a living doing psychotherapy. So maybe there's a fifth one whose theories lead to a particular program for psychotherapy -- a program that, as a non-clinician -- as you know my training is in personality psychology rather than clinical psychology per se, and I haven't practiced as a clinician... That therapist Freud, I think, in many ways -- although he got the

profession of psychoanalysis going and had a lot of influence on therapists who think of themselves as psychodynamic -- was not, I believe, strikingly successful. Which is why we hear these stories about people who are in endless psychoanalyses and pretty much seem to leave after years, maybe when their bank account is exhausted, with much of their neurosis in tact.

Dr. Dave: Ah, great. Great.

Davis: I will try to be more succinct.

Dr. Dave: No, no. I'm loving it. (laughter) In your own thinking, which parts of Freud's ideas have you discarded, and which still have currency for you?

Davis: Well, the most obvious. If you were teaching bright American undergraduates in the 1980's, if you were teaching Freud, sometimes you'd almost get shouted out of class when you get to the point of Freud's gender theories and his assumption that, whereas the little boy's psychology is shaped by the fear of castration -- itself a rather far-fetched idea in the extreme form -- the little girl's psychology is shaped by the belief that she's already been castrated, and she spends the rest of her life -- putting it a little too blatantly -- searching through heterosexual intercourse and child-bearing for the lost phallus. That theory is not simply inadequate. It's probably almost dead wrong. Carol Gilligan was probably the most visible theorist about that aspect of what was wrong with Freud, but there were many, many brilliant writings by feminist commentators on psychoanalysis and others -- I think we came to realize that there was something very wrong with the rigidity with which Freud held to his early sexual theories, particularly as they pertain to the psychology of women. Ultimately, that made Freud more interesting for a while, because we could take his text, read it closely, deconstruct it, and then try to replace it with interpretations of his own illustrative dreams and case histories. The Dora case got a tremendous amount of this attention -- the treatment of a supposedly very hysterical 18 year old girl. The close examination of those texts became a kind of model for post-modernism and deconstructionism. And so Freud becomes more of a target that's useful to analyze than an actual guide to behavior. Remember, I would get to this point in my psych lectures -- both intro and intermediate -- and say, you know, this would be an appropriate time to mention a theorist Freud doesn't mention, Woody Allen's character Zelig, who takes on the characteristics of any historical figure he comes in contact with. When he discusses Freud, he suddenly takes on a Viennese accent, and he says: "I was close to Freud, but we parted over penis envy, which he wanted to restrict to the female." In many ways, I think, Freud came to be understood in the '80's and '90's as a little boy's psychology at a time when feminism had sort of led us to find girls more interesting than boys. If you go back and look at the psychology of little boys, I suspect there's quite a bit relevant in reading Freud. He's considerably more difficult to easily assimilate into an adequate theory of female personality and erotic development. And in that sense, I took to describing myself, I guess, by late in the '90's, as a recovering Freudian.

Dr. Dave: Aha. So which of his ideas still have currency for you?

Davis: Well, I think the interpretive work is immensely important. I think the Interpretation of Dreams -- and there's a wonderful new translation from about four or five years ago by Joyce Crick that's closer to the original German and it uses the first edition, which is structured the way Freud structured it, rather than with all of his own additions and distractions later on. I think it's like reading Proust or Virginia Woolf or James Joyce's Ulysses. You are suddenly immersed in a world of mental phenomena that is immensely rich with some guidepost to how you might explore that realm. If you take the Interpretation of Dreams, as I've begun to do, not as a work of scientific psychology -- which Freud seemed to wish it were -- but as the first post-modern autobiographical novella -- it's immensely interesting to read that way. It becomes a portal into the biographical work on Freud, as we think we can second-guess Freud's interpretations, and show where he didn't go far enough, because we have his private correspondence; because we know what patients he was treating; because of other biographical work. That whole body of understanding, I think, is very appropriate to a kind of liberal arts understanding of intellectual history. Freud is really an exciting example. His later writings on culture are interesting, again, not because they're right -- he seems very socio-biological for example -- but because you can easily start with Freud and then move on to more contemporary writings that treat the same problems in a different way. At that point, I think, Freud is interesting perhaps as much because of his relationship to literature, on the one hand, and to anthropology and cultural theory on the other, as he is as part of a scientific psychology.

Dr. Dave: In fact, I've heard that he came very close to winning the Nobel Prize for Literature for the Interpretation of Dreams.

Davis: Well, I can't speak directly to that. I did write a review -- it must be in the early, mid '90's -- of a coffee table book that was published based on Freud's short chronicle. These [cortes de chronique], he kept. He kept a ledger book in which he would enter something each day. They weren't prose. They were simply little notes like ["Oscar Rie and then a cross"], meaning his old med school colleague, the pediatrician to his children, his card playing partner, had died. One such entry, in the early '30's, simply says, "Passed over for a Nobel Prize."

Dr. Dave: Huh.

Davis: Now, Freud thought he deserved the prize in medicine. Whether he was really considered in literature, I don't know, but if you go all the way back to the adolescent Freud, one of the marvelous pieces of Freudiana that became available in the '80's was his correspondence with his adolescent friend Silberstein. They describe each other's undergraduate experiences. Freud, also at about that time, writes a letter to a young man out in his birth town, which he visited early in his

adolescence. He describes the end of his high school examination. His [matura] exam. He says, "I got the highest marks in German, and my German prof said I had the rarest of all qualities. A truly original style." The German word, I think, is idiotische. So he says to his friend Amos Fluss (sp?), "So Amos. You didn't know you were writing to a German stylist. Save these letters. You never know. And now, Freud's correspondence reads -- whether we're talking about his correspondence in adolescence, or in his college years, or in middle age, or in full adulthood -- is immensely interesting. It is, in part, because Freud has a wonderfully rich style -- which is hard to capture in English, not because German can't be translated into English, but because Freud's translators, partly to please him, adopted a kind of scientific language. So fairly ordinary terms in German that Freud was using psychoanalytically get translated into pseudo-Greek terms like cathexis and parapraxis and so on. The literary quality of Freud begins to get lost.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Those are very off-putting words somehow. In my own attempts to teach Freud to undergraduates I often reflected on the observation that his early theories seem to dwell a lot on early childhood sexual trauma. In other words, initially, he thought that his neurotic patients had actually been seduced by their parents, or sexually molested. Then later he backed off of that theory, presumably because of the uproar that it caused, and he began to talk about these as being kind of projections of repressed desires, but not necessarily events that had happened. In our own time, there's so much that has come to light about sexual abuse of children, that it's made me wonder whether in fact maybe his first theory was right. Is this something you've wondered yourself?

Davis: I've thought a lot about it and in fact I've published a couple of papers based on my own reading of the correspondence with Wilhelm Fliess which I was reading in the 1990's. One of these papers I titled "A Theory for the '90's." I talked about Freud's -- it's called the seduction theory, but that's a misnomer. It's really what we would call a theory of post-traumatic stress disorder in adults who become neurotic because of a real trauma. By the time he first articulated this in 1896 was the result of a pre-pubertal sexual molestation or excitement. He even thought he could tell the difference between hysteria, neurosis, and obsessive-compulsive neurosis, by the characteristic of the symptoms which suggested a different form of abuse. Then he discovers, rather strikingly -- there's a famous letter from September 21, 1897 -- you can find a link to it in my Haverford course pages -- in which he says, "I have an amazing discovery, Wilhelm. I no longer believe my neurotica," by which he means, his theory that there is a specific developmental trajectory which requires the assumption of an actual sexual molestation or sexual trauma. What he's left with is an inability to tell the difference between a real memory of a real trauma, and a memory that sounds like that memory, but is a memory of an imagined trauma. There's no token of reality, Freud says, in the unconscious. Now, his way to get there, again, made him again a wonderful text as we were making our way through early postmodernism and deconstructionism, because what Freud actually says is, when he's ready to believe that all adult neurotics have experienced abuse, he says, "I have found in

every case seduction by the father.” Well, that’s the way it was stated in 1950 in an expurgated version of those letters that had been edited by Ernst, [Chris], and Freud’s daughter Anna who was immensely loyal, of course, to his reputation. They cut out a phrase there. What phrase actually says is that in every case -- my own not excluded -- the father is the seducer. Freud seems to have believed, by about 1895, 1896 -- based on reminiscences and conversations with family and his own sense of his siblings’ psychological health that Jacob Freud, his father, might have abused one or more of them. I don’t think he ever believed that he’d been abused. By a year later, which coincides with a period of mourning after his father’s death -- and books have been written about that -- Freud is really ready to conclude that his father probably hadn’t done those things, and that his readiness to believe that he had was a warning signal. That it was very hard to tell the difference. But in the political context of the 1980’s and 1990’s, the so-called memory wars, when estimates of the number of American children, for example, who’d been sexually abused in childhood went up drastically, it was possible for people to say, Freud had it almost right. That’s an aspect I examined. The most striking example is Alice Miller, a Swiss psychoanalyst, who became a major proponent of the notion that there was a great deal of unacknowledged sexual abuse of children which was causing neurosis. She dedicates one of her books, titled *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, “to the Sigmund Freud of 1896.” “And I write it,” she says, “in opposition to the Sigmund Freud of 1897.” The idea that Freud got it right and then abandoned that idea led to all sorts of interpretations. The most notable is documented beautifully in a long *New Yorker* piece by Janet Malcolm called “Trouble in the Archives.” The idea that Freud had backed away from the so-called seduction theory because it was embarrassing and he was being criticized. I think the abandonment is partial and is more complicated and more tangled up with personal issues. The way I read Freud, he never stopped believing that sexual abuse occurred in children probably more often than we would like to think, and then when it did, it often led to adult difficulties. But you could no longer postulate that such an actual experience was always the case. In fact, I think one would conclude, along with Freud, that it was probably the less common. The most common occurrence according to Freud is that, while only some of us have had the misfortune to be abused and traumatized, we’ve all experienced the Oedipus complex. So everyone has had troubling erotic and aggressive feelings towards parents, and those feelings have been forced from consciousness. That becomes the basis for later emotional crises of the kind that psychoanalysis treats.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Reflecting on that for myself, I know the first time that I ever heard about the Oedipus complex, and the suggestion that I would want to sleep with my mother, that seemed absurd because I was an adult and my mother was my age plus 23. But later, as I thought back about it, my mother was 23 when I was born, and she was a knockout. Just incredibly beautiful. Of course I fell in love with her. It was incredible. I’d go to school and kids who’d seen my mother would say, “Oh, your mother’s so beautiful. Your mother’s so beautiful.” So for better or for worse I know that this has made a big dent in my psyche.

Davis: Yes, and one of the things I need to do this summer is revise a chapter on Freud's relationship with Jung. There's a point when relations are getting very testy when Jung says, "Is it really plausible to suppose that the boy loves his middle-aged mother with her wrinkled breasts and so on?" Well, first of all, as you point out, particularly in a period of large families and shorter life spans, an awful lot of children were born to young mothers, but they were also born lacking a mature cerebral cortex. They couldn't really sort things out, and the very nature of our existence has required in most human societies, not only that the infant be nourished at the mother's breast, but often carried around next to the mother's body and sleeping in the same bed with the mother. And then the idea that this infant begins to wonder what daddy's doing in the same bed, and what those sounds mean if he hears them coming from the same room... It's not utterly far-fetched. On the other hand, to show the specific details of that elaborate reasoning that the child is said to go through, where the little boy not only worries that daddy will do something if he continues to sneak into bed with mommy the way he wants to, but that something will necessarily be the loss of his penis, out of some observation that daddy has one and mommy doesn't have one -- that begins to seem very far-fetched.

Dr. Dave: Aha. You cited Woody Allen earlier.

Davis: Yes.

Dr. Dave: That brings to mind, in one of his movies -- or maybe it was a comedy routine I heard -- Woody Allen says, "Freud says everyone wants to sleep with his mother. That's absurd. I've never even met his mother." Do you recall that one?

Davis: (laughter) Yeah. I hadn't thought of it this way, but in fact, Freud was given a particularly complicated family situation to figure out. So if you want to know why he seems to be so tangled up with family love affairs and dynamics, it may be because he was dumped right away into the AP course. His father had been married before and had two adult sons who lived in this little Moravian town very near Freud. They were old enough to be his uncles but he was taught to think of them as his brothers. His mother was the age, roughly, of these two uncles. It's reasonable to suppose -- and again, I'm summarizing dozens and dozens of books on Freud biography -- it's reasonable to suppose, from what Freud tells us later on, that he believed he wondered as a child whether there might be something going on between his mother and one of these attractive uncles who seemed like a more plausible partner for his mother than his aging father. There's also a mysterious second wife named Rebecca whose name appears on some documents and then she disappears. So one could imagine a family dynamic in which the generations are getting confused. There's no question that Freud's young mother, with her much older husband, poured not just all of her love but her ambitions into her first-born son, and made him feel that he was truly extraordinary. That would have led, again, to both comparisons with these brothers who were old

enough to be his father, and with his own younger siblings, in relationship to whom he was always the family star and the claimer of the resources and so on. So the man who argues that everyone is shaped by a complex family drama had a more complex family drama by which to be shaped than most of us do.

Dr. Dave: Mhm. So many of the things that you're saying trigger various thoughts in me. I want to run down all these paths and I can only go down one at a time. You were talking about the primitive level of cognitive development of the young child whose cortex is not yet fully developed. As a father, I've had a couple of opportunities to observe some of these phenomena that Freud talks about. For example, one of my sons, when he was quite young, was in the crib. He was standing up in his crib, and he said to me -- I remember this so clearly -- "Daddy, I wish you would take a long trip, and not come back." I'm not sure if he said the "not come back," but I think that was kind of the gist of it. It was very clear. I don't remember all of the context, but the context was very clearly, "I want mommy to myself." I mean, that's what it was about.

Davis: Yes, and I think if people often -- after their curiosity's been aroused by a psych course or a few books -- keep their eyes open, almost anyone can produce those examples. Now, of course, they're not just directed at parents. There's often an older child who's maybe just a toddler when the second baby is born who will suggest to mommy that it would be a good idea for her to get rid of this little -- competitor, one way or the other. Sibling rivalry figures in there too. And I think, again, to come back to the large question of why Freud hangs around, the details of the theory are far more specific than Freud's data really allowed him to claim. They're tendentious and they've been very hard to refute because the psychoanalyst can easily say, well, if you admit to having desired your mother, you have the Oedipus complex, and if you deny it vigorously, you've repressed it, which shows how powerful it really was. But despite that philosophical problem, that family dynamics matter, and that changing family dynamics -- changing family sizes and so on -- matter, should lead us to wonder what effect that has on personality -- that's an obvious consequence of reading Freud. Freud himself, curiously enough, became already by about 1906 or so very worried that his disciples who claimed to believe his theory would find ways to replace the more troubling parts of it -- notably, infantile sexuality or childhood erotic desire -- with more palatable ideas. So when Adler gets interested in sibling rivalry, Freud eventually sees that as a resistance to the centrality of sibling rivalry. When Jung gets interested in the idea that there might be archetypal influences on consciousness, Freud again sees that as a way of copping out on the centrality of sexuality, so he begins to seem rather a crank on that subject. A lot of the argument then comes about by whether you can take the overall notion of the complexity of the mind, and the idea that many of our motives are not readily accessible to us, but they can be inferred by Freud's methods. To separate that useful theory out from the details of Freud's own particular notions of psychological development and trauma and neurosis has been difficult, but I think it's an exercise worth doing.

Dr. Dave: You mention Jung -- and I have an ongoing interest in Jung -- and on your website I notice that a few years ago you published a paper titled "Jung and the Psychoanalytic Movement." What was your thesis in that paper?

Davis: That's the paper I need to revise because it's part of a Cambridge Companion to Jung, and mine is the opening chapter. The rest of the chapters are written by people with more expertise on Jung than I. I worked from the Freud-Jung correspondence. In that case, I think we have all of the important letters on both sides, and they've been carefully read and edited by people with insider knowledge of both the Jungian and the Freudian perspective. I think Freud is drawn to Jung by Jung's intelligence, by his greater exposure to psychotic phenomena that Freud hadn't studied, by his usefulness as a spokesperson for the psychoanalytic movement. But from the point of view of Jungians, Jung outgrows Freud over a few years, and their relationship becomes much more complex and ultimately dissolves in enmity. I think it might be fairer to say that an important component is that Freud was less a scientist and less an empirical worker than he wanted to believe himself to be. When Jung gets closer to difficult philosophical questions, to taking a serious interest in mysticism and other forms of consciousness, a part of Freud is attracted by that, but then he's repelled and frightened off and sees it as a distraction. So the battle lines are really drawn. I think that post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory would have been much more interesting if Jung's core ideas and his own expression of them, as well as the most articulate Jungians' expressions of them had been in regular dialogue with the Freudian discourse. But essentially those people separated and had as little to do with each other as they possibly could.

Dr. Dave: If Freud were alive today, what questions would you like to ask him?

Davis: Well, he liked to claim -- and continued to do so late in life -- that psychoanalysis was a transition discipline that would eventually largely be replaced by hard biology and neurology. He thought his ideas would continue to be seen to have some verisimilitude, but we'd understand them at a neurological level. I'm sure Freud would be intensely interested in that, and if this Freud we're going to resurrect could be quickly put through a Ph.D. program in molecular biology, embryology, and so on, and make contact with genomics. Have you been vindicated, Freud, by this knowledge? Most of my friends who are real biological scientists have very little interest in Freud except as somebody who during a brief moment of relative ignorance posed some interesting problems that we would now know how to approach. Personally, the question I would like to ask Freud is, haven't you mislead us about the extent to which you are really a member of the humanities and not the sciences? Wouldn't it be fair to say of the teenage boy who committed to memory long passages of Sophocles and Virgil, who loved to write Spanish doggerel poetry to his best friend, and who was so fascinated with the influences on a Leonardo and a Dostoyevsky -- shouldn't we locate you in that branch of the learned disciplines? I think Freud would shudder at that, because

that wasn't the vision he had of himself, but I think that's where his real genius lay. And as someone who as an undergraduate started as a would-be physicist and wound up as a personality psychologist deeply interested in literary studies, I think that partly accounts for Freud's appeal to me. I thought I saw through the scientific façade of Freud to the hermeneutic genius underneath.

Dr. Dave: Mhm. You were just talking about your friends in the biological sciences who seem to have little interest in Freud. I wonder if you're aware -- something that I was just surprised to learn is that there are researchers around the world who are studying an area referred to as neuropsychanalysis in which they're attempting to correlate some of Freud's ideas with brain structures and processes. Are you aware of this work?

Davis: I confess to you David, that's exactly what I am -- aware that they exist.

Dr. Dave: OK. I haven't gotten further than that yet either.

Davis: No. And I would have to say that my own particular colleagues are much closer to the petri dish and the (inaudible) microscope. Those questions seem still a little bit too broad. But you know, I love reading Oliver Sacks, and I had the occasion to chat with him a little bit about Freud when he spoke at Bryn Mawr several years ago. I think Sacks is obviously learned about a neurology that Freud could only have imagined. He also writes beautifully. I think there's some of the flavor of the Freud who makes us care about clinical histories that we hope eventually to be able to understand at a more neurophysiological level than we currently can. My problem is with taking psychoanalysis as a therapeutic theory -- with its ideas about transference and countertransference and so on -- and trying to imagine that we know more about what's going on in the patient's brain than we really do.

Dr. Dave: Mhm. Do you think people will still be talking about Freud 150 years from now?

Davis: I'm sure he will be in the intellectual landscape. The question is, will he be more like the Freud we've been arguing about the last 50 or 75 years or more like an important enlightenment philosopher? So there will be a point at which you need to read Descartes, or you need to read Husserl, because they were important at the time, but perhaps they'll be seen more as part of a tradition. Freud, as I said -- the guy who focused on the family drama with all its sibling rivalry -- could be said to have killed off a lot of his most promising intellectual offspring so that no one quite stands as his equal. If such figures do not emerge -- if we don't get theorists who can do something like what Freud did, I think the Freudian movement may be seen as some sort of intellectual dead-end. I would still like to believe, though, that people are going to find their way to the Interpretation of Dreams, or to the Dora case, or to some of Freud's wonderful little literary essays, or even to Civilization and Its Discontents, and find themselves fascinated.

Dr. Dave: Well, Doug, you've certainly held my fascination. If the listener wanted to read more about Freud, or perhaps had no exposure, really, other than some slighting remarks that they heard in college, is there a book -- or maybe two books -- that you would recommend?

Davis: Well, I've long believed -- and it's characteristic of the way we've tended to teach psychology at Haverford -- that you're usually better going to primary sources than you are by settling for a textbook recounting. There's an immense amount of writing about Freud, and some of it is very good, but I'd still urge people to do some original reading. I would suggest that they read at least parts of the Interpretation of Dreams. The second, third, fourth chapter. You can find a link to a not terribly adequate translation by Brill that's on the web. You can find it in classics and psychology website and there are links to it in my many web pages. Among the books about Freud... I think it depends a lot... if you map yourself on those four or five ways of looking at Freud that I outlined earlier, which of them is most interesting to you, I'd have different advice depending on which of them. For example, if you were interested in Freud's grounding in 19th century biology, there's a wonderful book from the 1980's that hasn't in my view been superseded called Freud: Biologist of the Mind by Frank Sulloway. If you wanted the grand scope of Freud's life, the two major biographies are daunting -- although as biographies they read fairly fast -- Ernest Jones' three volume The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud from the 1960's is still extremely interesting. All academic libraries have copies. I think to simply start reading that and find out where you're interested, the more recent biography is Peter Gay's. It's problematic in the way it treats some of the theories Gay doesn't like but it certainly provides a tremendous sweep in talking about Freud's life as a whole. A marvelous little window into what it might have been like to be on Freud's couch was written by H.D., the American writer -- Hilde Doolittle, but she went by H.D. -- called Tribute to Freud. I have a little excerpt on one of my websites. I found that just absolutely magic. You can really see yourself trudging up the stairs from the first to the second floor of 19 Berggasse, and seeing the previous patient come down the steps, and looking at all the antiquities in Freud's study, and trying to figure out what was going on in his head. I thought that was absolutely marvelous. And finally -- you can edit these down -- D.M. Thomas, the British novelist, wrote two novels in which Freud appears as a character. The first, from the late 1970's or early 1980's, is called The White Hotel. The second, which appeared in the late '90's, is called Eating Pavlova. I had the same feeling over that long period of time when I read D.M. Thomas that he had eerily sneaked somehow into the archive and read everything that everyone else had read. Even though the factual details of his two novels are made up, there's a way of seeing Freud that I found profoundly interesting. So I'd recommend both of those novels.

Dr. Dave: Well, Doug, you know we've run a bit long here. You're such a wonderful guest. This will not be the last time that we find something to talk about.

Davis: Thank you. And we should find a topic where I could actually give you presidential debate type answers and try to stay on topic. But you're correct in surmising that I've been talking about Freud for so many years, it's hard to do so without launching into a lot of the details. I would invite you, when you post this, to link to a couple of my pages so people get an idea -- not because it's by any means the right way to do Freud -- but just an example of trying to build pedagogical resources on the web for thinking about Freud.

Dr. Dave: I will definitely put the links on the site. So I'm going to close off the interview now and say thank you.

Davis: Thank you so much David. I'll be talking to you again.